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By David Bedard

176th Wing Public Affairs

212th Rescue Squadron marks change of command with unique Alaska backdrop

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Airmen of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing marked the Feb. 10 212th Rescue Squadron change of command in a unique way by hosting a tandem jump at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's Malamute Drop Zone.

The 212th RQS was assisted by their sister rescue triad units, the 210th Rescue Squadron who operated HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters as the jump platform, and the 211th Rescue Squadron who provided drop zone control on the ground.

After the jump, the 176th Wing Airmen moved across the base to the 212th RQS rescue complex where Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Matthew Kirby relinquished command to Lt. Col. John Romsper.

Capt. Daniel Warren, 212th RQS combat rescue officer, said the event followed weeks of planning and coordination culminating in two HH-60's disgorging their cargo of singleton pararescuemen and three tandem-jump pairings that afforded Brig. Gen. Anthony Stratton, 176th Wing commander, Lt. Col. Jeremy Groat, 210th RQS commander, and Lt. Col. Joshua Armstrong, 211th RQS commander, the unique opportunity to free-fall jump from a helicopter while tethered to an experienced CRO or pararescuemen (PJs).

A low cloud ceiling yielding limited visibility threatened to have the event called off, but as late morning gave way to early afternoon, the clouds lifted above the minimum height required to jump at free-fall altitudes.

Master Sgt. Ryan Conti, 211th Rescue Squadron HC-130J Combat King II loadmaster, drove labyrinthine range roads to arrive at Malamute DZ early to brave single-digit temperatures and open up the range and lay out neon-orange VS-17 panels in a "V" to mark where jumpers needed to land.

Once the helicopters started their pre-jump sequence, PJ jumpmasters pushed out streamers that looked like giant multi-colored confetti. By observing the streamers' descent, the jumpmasters could gauge the wind direction and the 210th RQS pilots could position the helicopter appropriately.

Senior Master Sgt. Jeremy Diola, 212th RQS superintendent, said he could see the streamers changing direction, indicating the wind direction was radically different at varying altitudes requiring flexibility during the jump.

The first HH-60 dropped solo jumpers, and they had little problem vectoring in on the “V” and Conti’s billowing green smoke grenade, hitting their mark within a 50-meter radius before rapidly gathering up their parachutes to clear the DZ before.

The second Pave Hawk dropped the somewhat awkward tandem-jump duos. Kirby said having another person hanging under the parachute canopy makes maneuvering a little more cumbersome, but the CROs and PJs were up to the job.

Coupled with Tech. Sgt. Jason Hughes, 212th RQS PJ, Stratton applied his pre-jump training, lifting his legs and keeping his feet and knees together to make for a safe landing. Before landing, Hughes pulled on the control toggles, flaring the canopy and making for a safe landing.

Once they consolidated on the DZ, Kirby gathered the group to host a leadership-development session stressing the importance of innovation while respecting the wisdom and accomplishments of the past.

The helicopters then landed and scooped up the group of parachutists old and new before conveying them to JBER-Elmendorf to attend the squadron’s formal change-of-command ceremony.

Presiding officer, Col. Matthew Calabro, 176th Operations Group commander, commended Kirby for his tenure as the 212th RQS commander.

“Matt (Kirby), the squadron has been busy under your command, most recently returning from combat deployments in Somalia and Djibouti, while concurrently maintaining (rescue) alert for (Alaskan Command) and 11th Air Force and carrying the message of innovation and synergy down the path of Air Force Special Warfare Combat Rescue 2035 vision,” he said. “You absolutely excelled as a squadron commander. The men and women of the 212th and the triad are better because you were at the conn.”

Kirby said he is confident in Romspert, an officer he has worked with for 13 years, and his ability to continue the squadron’s culture of innovation.

“John Romspert is one of the best leaders I could ever imagine taking over and leading this organization,” he said. “John has humility, character, courage, integrity – exactly what we need. He is the right man at the right time to take charge of this organization.”

Romspert said he is determined to bring the squadron to a new level of performance.

“I am humbled to be chosen as your commander,” he said. “I will do my best to lead from the front and to be there for you day and night. Our values of humility, excellence and respect are what we are going to carry on in the future.”

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.

2. **DVIDS link** includes selected full-resolution photos. (Accessible from military computers.)

<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/388950/212th-rescue-squadron-marks-change-command-with-unique-alaska-backdrop>

3. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/176wg/albums/72157718256087343>



Alaska Air National Guard Col. Matthew Komatsu, 176th Mission Support Group commander, recovers his free-fall parachute Feb. 10, 2021, following a jump from a 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's Malamute Drop Zone, while Senior Master Sgt. Jeffrey Hamilton, 212th Rescue Squadron pararescueman, comes in for landing. The jump preceded the change-of-command ceremony for 212th RQS, Komatsu's previous command. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by David Bedard/Released)



Alaska Air National Guard Senior Master Sgt. Jeffrey Hamilton, 212th Rescue Squadron pararescueman, recovers his free-fall parachute Feb. 10, 2021, following a jump from a 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's Malamute Drop Zone. The jump preceded the change-of-command ceremony for 212th RQS. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by David Bedard/Released)



Alaska Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Stratton, 176th Wing commander, keeps his feet and knees together during a tandem jump with Tech. Sgt. Jason Hughes, 212th Rescue Squadron pararescueman, following an exit from a 210th Rescue Squadron HH-60G Pave Hawk Feb. 10, 2021, at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's Malamute Drop Zone. The jump preceded the change-of-command ceremony for 212th Rescue Squadron. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by David Bedard/Released)